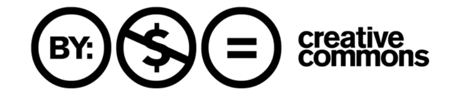


Topoi

Acolytes and Aspergilla : on five coin types of Heliopolis

Kevin Butcher



ACOLYTES AND ASPERGILLA :
On five coin types of Heliopolis *

The coin types of Heliopolis have long been recognized as an important source of information about the architecture and cults of the monumental sanctuaries there. Most of the attention has focused on the architectural types and the divine images thought to pertain to the presumed Heliopolitan triad of Jupiter, Venus and Mercury [1]. While the identities of the physical structures represented on the coins

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* Part of the research for this paper was undertaken while the author was in residence as a Villa Visiting Scholar at the Getty Villa in Malibu in 2007. I would like to express gratitude to staff and colleagues during my stay for providing a stimulating working environment : Charles Salas, Erich Gruen, Kristina Meinking, Barbara Furbush, Sandy Garcia, Molly Swetnam-Burland, Cecilia d'Ercole, and Kara Cooney. Some initial thoughts on the matter were presented at the colloquium in Beirut, and I would like to thank Levon Nordiguian, Pierre-Louis Gatier, and Jean-Baptiste Yon for inviting me to take part, and Julien Aliquot for his helpful comments. Jean-Baptiste Yon deserves further credit for his patience in allowing me to greatly exceed the original deadline for submission. I must also express gratitude for those who kindly agreed to allow me to reproduce their pictures : Andreas Kropp, who also alerted me to a number of useful references (*Fig. 2*) ; Daniel Schmutz and the Münzkabinett, Historisches Museum, Berne (*Fig. 12*) ; Ted Kaizer and Yale University Art Gallery (*Fig. 13*) ; and Michel Prieur (*Fig. 14*).

1. In general, see H. WINNEFELD, « Die antiken Kulte von Baalbek », in Th. WIEGAND, *Baalbek. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen in den Jahren 1898-1905, Band II*, Berlin – Leipzig (1923), p. 110-128 ; see also his study « Zur Geschichte des syrischen Heliopolis », *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 69 (1914), p. 139-159 ; H. SEYRIG, « La triade héliopolitaine et les temples de Baalbek », *Syria* 10 (1929), p. 314-356, pl. lxxxiv, no. 6 = *Scripta varia*, Paris (1985), p. 3-50 ; Y. HAJJAR, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek. Son culte et sa diffusion à travers les textes littéraires et les documents iconographiques et épigraphiques*, 2 vols, Leiden (1977) ; and his study « Baalbek, grand centre religieux sous l'Empire », *ANRW* II 18.4, p. 2458-2604. For the coins, see F. DE SAULCY, *Numismatique de la Terre Sainte*, Paris (1874) (hereafter DE SAULCY) ; W. WROTH, *A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum. Galatia, Cappadocia, and Syria*, London (1899)

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is not in doubt, those of the divine figures found on the coinage present greater challenges. Some are clearly identifiable – Mercury with his caduceus, and a city Tyche being the most obvious – yet strangely, images of Jupiter Heliopolitanus are entirely absent. The only candidate for Venus seems to be the Tyche, and other evidence in the form of reliefs and inscriptions helps to reconcile the two. Prominence is given to the temples, particularly that of Jupiter, but also that of Mercury, leaving us in no doubt about the importance of these cults at Heliopolis. Nevertheless it must be of some significance that the highly distinct cult images of the « triad », known from reliefs, are never found on the coins. This is at variance with many other cities in the region, the civic coinages of which often depict distinctive cult images. It would seem as if the special cult images of Jupiter, Venus and Mercury were deemed inappropriate by whoever was responsible for selecting the designs for Heliopolis' civic coinage. As a result, scholars interested in these deities have to resort to interpreting some of the more generic-looking figures of deities found on the coins as representations of those that they are seeking, and to draw most of the evidence for iconography from sources other than the coins of Heliopolis. This approach is not without its problems, not least the assumption that the cult images and symbols used in the great sanctuaries were identical to those in the locations where such imagery is found.

However, these well-known deities and their images are not the main focus of this essay. Instead I want to concentrate on some other figures that have not received the same level of notice as the coin types depicting the temples, or Mercury and Tyche, probably because they are difficult to interpret in terms of what is known or surmised about the cults at Heliopolis [2]. Indeed, they have been expressly rejected by a leading authority, Y. Hajjar, as pertaining to the Heliopolitan « triad » [3]. Various identifications have been proposed, and while some seem more convincing than others, none are entirely satisfactory. Indeed, the fact that they have sometimes received different identifications from the pen of a single author suggests that even the experts have doubted their own classifications. And while I acknowledge that their identity is of great interest, this essay does not pretend to provide solutions. One does not have to be able to identify such figures to find them interesting. Thus the essay is less concerned with trying to make the coin types fit with what we know or assume about cults at Heliopolis

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(hereafter BMC) ; and O. Mørkholm, *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum. The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, Danish National Museum. Syria : Cities*, New Jersey (1982) (hereafter SNG Copenhagen).

2. One of the most detailed discussions of the types considered here seems to be that by S. Ronzevalle, « La stèle de Ferzol », *MUSJ* 21.1 (1937) = S. Ronzevalle, *Jupiter Héliopolitain, nova et vetera*, at p. 29-71, especially p. 54-57.

3. Y. Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek. Iconographie, théologie, culte et sanctuaires*, Montréal (1985) ; *ANRW* II 18.4 (above, n. 1) ; *LIMC*, s.v. « Heliopolitani dei », especially p. 583, no. 85 and p. 587, no. 124.

than with examining various aspects of their iconography to see how this imagery connects more generally with divine symbolism in the region ; bearing in mind that iconographic parallels need not imply the identity of one divine image with another.

One obstacle to understanding the material lies in its very nature. The coins of Heliopolis were issued intermittently over a period of slightly more than sixty years. The earliest datable ones belong to the reign of Septimius Severus (AD 193-211). Further issued were produced, probably during the sole reign of Caracalla (AD 211-217) and certainly during the reigns of Philip I and II (AD 244-249) and Valerian and Gallienus (AD 253-260). Though these issues encompass a remarkable array of reverse types, a major difficulty faced by anyone trying to interpret the types is the overall poor state of preservation of many specimens. Many older descriptions, though they might seem authoritative, were based on single specimens that were quite worn or corroded [4]. Even today it is often hard to find examples that preserve the details sufficiently well, and sometimes descriptions have to be built up from the examination of a number of coins of the same type, and by comparison with coins issued in the reigns of different emperors. Crucial details are usually small and only partly visible, even on the better specimens. As a result, certainty is often impossible, and one is well aware that the discovery of even a single, perfectly-preserved specimen has the potential to undermine an interpretation rather than vindicate it. The coin types are a form of evidence that has to be considered with caution and are a salutary reminder of the limits of interpretation.

Four of those types which concern us show two male figures who have in the past been variously designated gods, acolytes, genii, ephebes or athletes. Whether each type presents us with the same figures might be debated, although there are similarities that could lead us to that conclusion. However, explicit evidence for their identities is lacking, which is no doubt the reason why so many wildly divergent identities have been proposed.

Our first type is found only on coins issued in the reign of Septimius Severus (AD 193-211).



Fig. 1a *Fig. 1b* *Fig. 1c*

Fig. 1a – Type 1. Reverse of a bronze coin of Septimius Severus from Heliopolis, showing clearly the individual leaves or branches of foliage in the « bouquets ».
Fig. 1b – As previous, but there appears to be differences in the forms of the bouquets.
Fig. 1c – As previous, with traces of drapery on chest of both figures.

4. This unsatisfactory state of affairs has just been rectified by Ziad Sawaya, *Histoire de Bérytos et d'Héliopolis d'après leurs monnaies*, BAH 185, Beirut (2009).

1. Two naked male figures standing. This type is well-described by Hajjar, II p. 466, no. 336 : « deux figures mâles, debout, de face, la tête tournée à gauche, portant chacune, appuyé sur l'épaule gauche, un objet qui est probablement un bouquet de fleurs et de fruits, et tenant dans la main droite les pattes antérieures d'un quadrupède dressé, difficile à déterminer » (*Fig. 1a-c*). T.E. Mionnet, *Description des médailles antiques, grecques et romaines*, vol. V, Paris (1811), p. 298, no. 103 ; de Saulcy, p. 8, no. 8 ; Ronzevalle, *op. cit.*, n. 3, plate XVI, 1a-e ; SNG Cop 428.

There is a temptation to see these male figures as identical or even as twins, but examination of a number of specimens reveals some repetitive details that may be significant. The figure on the left appears to be bearded, the other clean shaven. This feature is consistent on all specimens seen by the author, though the quality of the die engraving means that the presumed beard is usually rendered as a prominent stroke without any other attempt at definition. The prominent stroke is consistently absent from the right hand figure, which suggests that the engraver was attempting to differentiate the facial features of the two. The clean shaven one, if such he be, wears a chlamys about his shoulders, folds of which fall from his left arm ; on some specimens it appears that the « bearded » figure is similarly clad (*Fig. 1c*). The objects which both hold over their left shoulder have been variously described in the past : *SNG Copenhagen* follows Mionnet in regarding them as clubs ; de Saulcy saw them as cornucopias « en forme d'énormes bouquets » ; Winnefeld was uncertain, suggesting (as had earlier commentators) clubs, sheafs of corn or flaming torches [5] ; and Ronzevalle (above, n. 2) identified their shape as an « énorme bouquet ». The figures have recently been considered in more detail by Peter Haider, who agrees that the objects are bouquets [6]. The descriptions of Ronzevalle and Hajjar seem most appropriate, and one is immediately reminded of the bunches of foliage that are shown in the hands of Syrian priests in certain reliefs (*Fig. 2-3*) [7]. These bunches of foliage are generally thought to be aspergilla, ritual sprinklers [8].

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5. H. Winnefeld, « Zur Geschichte des syrischen Heliopolis » (n. 1 above).

6. P.W. Haider, « Götter und Glaubensvorstellungen in Heliopolis-Baalbek », in E.M. Ruprechtsberger, *Vom Steinbruch zum Jupitertempel von Heliopolis/Baalbek (Libanon)*, Linz (1999), p. 101-142.

7. R. Krumeich, « Darstellungen syrischer Priester an den kaiserzeitlichen Tempeln von Niha und Chehim im Libanon », *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 10 (1998), p. 171-199.

8. On aspergilla in general see *THESCRA* V, 2b, p. 188, and A.V. Siebert, *Instrumenta sacra. Untersuchungen zu römischen Opfer-, Kult und Priestgeräten*, Berlin (1999), *s.v.* « aspergillum ». The Roman types vary from simple branches to those made of animal hair with long handles (the latter sometimes made from an animal hoof). Syrian and Lebanese examples are discussed by P.-L. Gatier, « La 'colonne de Qartaba' et la romanisation de la montagne libanaise », in P. Bielinski, F.M. Stepniowski (eds),



Fig. 2 – The priest Narkisos from the temple of Hadaranes at Niha in the Bekaa. Note the form of the bouquet, with a handle. Photo Andreas Kropp.



Fig. 3 – [?]nonianus, a priest (?), from the pediment of the temple at Qsarnaba in the Bekaa. Note that he also holds a « bouquet » over his shoulder. Photo by the author, 1994.

Our figures, however, are unlikely to be priests, particularly given the fact that they are naked. However, there are parallels to these figures among the repertiore of divine representations from the Bekaa Valley identified long ago by Ronzevalle, although they are not so close so as to permit us to assume (as Ronzevalle supposed) that they are representations of the same divinities [9]. A rupestrine relief from Forzol and a statue from Yammouné both depict a naked, youthful male figure, holding a branch of foliage over the left shoulder, very much in the same manner as on our coin, but cradling a small quadruped (usually identified as a lamb or goat) and holding more vegetal matter in their lowered right hands [10]. Closer to

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Aux pays d'Allat : Mélanges offerts à Michal Gawlikowski, Warsaw (2005), p. 77-97 ; and J.-P. Rey-Coquais, « Sur quelques divinités de la Syrie antique », *Mélanges Pierre Lévêque 6. Religion*, Centre de Recherches d'Histoire Ancienne, vol. 113, Paris (1992), p. 247-260.

9. S. Ronzevalle, *op. cit.* n. 2, at p. 29-71.

10. Ronzevalle, *loc. cit.* For the Forzol relief : Hajjar, *op. cit.*, n. 1, vol. II, p. 468-471, with references ; *LIMC*, *s.v.* « Dionysus (in peripheria orientali) », no. 15 ; a clear black-and-white image is provided by Seyrig in a review of Ronzevalle (*Syria* 19 [1938], p. 362-5, fig. 2) ; good colour images are to be found in L. Nordiguian, *Temples de l'époque romaine au Liban*, Beirut (2005), p. 48-49. Yammouné : *LIMC*, *s.v.* « Dionysus (in peripheria orientali) », no. 17 ; detailed black-and-white images are provided by Ronzevalle, plates IX-X ; for more recent images, see N. Jidejian,

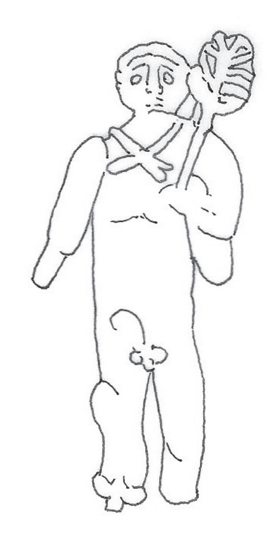


Fig. 4 – Drawing of a lead figurine from Ain ed-Jouj, showing a naked male figure ('dieu à la palme') holding a branch or bouquet over his shoulder. After SEYRIG, *op. cit.*, n. 11, pl. lxxxiv, G.

the coins, perhaps, but more schematic, is the posture adopted by a fragmentary lead figurine from Ain ed-Jouj at Baalbek (*Fig. 4*). This depicts a naked male figure, with an animal skin (?) knotted around his neck, holding a branch (?) over his left shoulder and with his right arm lowered, hand missing. This was identified by Hajjar as a satyr with an animal skin around his neck and holding a thyrsus ; Seyrig saw it as a « dieu à la palme » [11].

From these representations we can be fairly confident about the identification of the attributes held by our figures as branches of foliage, and indeed the better-preserved specimens of the coins appear to show an attempt to render individual or bunches of leaves by means of strokes. On some specimens the bunch held by the « bearded » figure seems bushier and the one held by the « beardless » one slenderer (*Fig. 1b*), as if there is an attempt to differentiate the type of foliage, but this difference is not consistent.

The animal held by the bearded figure on the left has protruding horns, and on some issues these look as if they have branches, like the horns of a stag, but on no specimens are the horns so clear as to be decisive on this point, and it may be the case that a goat is intended [12]. The animal held by the clean-shaven figure is less distinct, but it seems not to have horns protruding from its head. Ronzevalle identified them as a goat and a lion. These identifications are possible,

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Lebanon, its Gods, Legends and Myths Illustrated by Coins, Beirut (c. 1988), p. 83 ; C. DOUMET-SERHAL *et al.*, *Stones and Creed. 100 Artefacts from Lebanon's Antiquity*, Beirut (1998), p. 86, 175, no. 45. Other parallels, including two statuettes, one from Yammouné in stone and one from the Akkar in bronze, are among those provided by Ronzevalle (*op. cit.*, n. 2, plates XII-XIII). The latter two statuettes are shown feeding a quadruped ; on the coins, the figure on the right might be interpreted as feeding the uncertain creature before him, but the left hand figure clearly does not because the creature's head is turned away from him.

11. HAJJAR, *op. cit.,* n. 1, p. 140-1, no. 127 ; H. SEYRIG, « La triade héliopolitaine et les temples de Baalbek », *Syria* 10 (1929), p. 314-356, pl. lxxxiv, no. 6 = *Scripta varia*, Paris (1985), p. 3-50. See also HAIDER, *op. cit.* n. 6, p. 127.

12. HAIDER, *op. cit.*, n. 6, proposes a ram, and his drawing of the type (p. 125) appears to support this identification, but the specimens illustrated here (*Fig. 1a-c*) show the horns pointing upwards from the top of the animal's head, not curving downwards. The specimens illustrated by Ronzevalle support the conclusion here that the animal appears to be a stag or a goat.



Fig. 5 – Drawing of a lead figurine from Ain ed-Jouj, showing two animals either side of a tree or vegetal motif. After BADRE (*op. cit.* n. 13), p. 195, fig. 14.

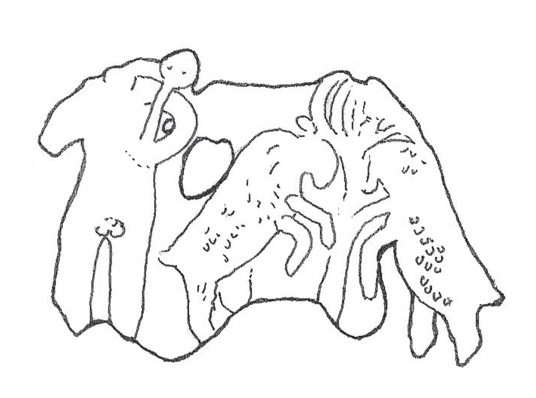


Fig. 6 – Drawing of a lead figurine from Ain ed-Jouj, showing two animals on either side of a tree or vegetal motif and a naked male figure in a similar pose to the one in fig. 4. After BADRE (*op. cit.* n. 13), p. 195, fig. 14.

given the general shapes of the animals, but no specimens seem clear enough to admit certainty. The head of the horned animal is consistently shown turning away to the left ; the head of the animal held by the beardless figure is too indistinct to determine which way it is turned. Once again the Ain ed-Jouj lead figurines may provide additional clues. A recent publication by Leila Badre [13] illustrates two relevant pieces : one showing two animals standing on their hind legs, positioned heraldically facing each other either side of what appears to be a tree (*Fig. 5*) ; the other similar, but accompanied by a fragmentary naked male figure holding something (branch or caduceus ?) over his left shoulder, in a pose rather like the « satyr » or « dieu à la palme » (*Fig. 6*). In both cases the right hand animal appears to be a goat ; the identity of the left hand one is more difficult to determine. Badre suggests a feline, although both examples appear to have short tails. I wonder if some ruminant such as a ram is intended ; in *Fig. 5* there is a curl on the side of its head that might be a ram's horn. The shape of this second animal resembles that held by the beardless figure on the coins, but too vaguely to be decisive. Furthermore, while these animals on the lead pieces may provide clues to those held by the acolytes or genies on the coins, one should bear in mind that the repertoire of such « heraldic » devices may have been broader, representing a variety of different animals : another fragmentary lead object from the original German excavations at Ain ed-Jouj has a very similar animal-and-tree arrangement and shows what looks

13. L. BADRE, « Les figurines de plomb de 'Ain-al-Djouj », *Syria* 76 (1999), p. 181-96, fig. 14.

like a horse to the left of the foliate device (identified by Hajjar as a cypress) ; in this case the right hand animal is missing [14].

Parallels for the two naked male figures – their pose, and their attributes – can therefore be identified in the corpus of divine images from the Bekaa Valley. All of this begs the question, perhaps premature at this stage : Who are they ? Various solutions to this question have been advanced. Ronzevalle proposed that the figures were Dionysus-Hermes-Adonis (Mercury Heliopolitanus) and Gennaios-Genneas, but this suggestion has generally been abandoned. Haider has suggested Hermes and Dionysus (he thinks that both figures are beardless). Hajjar, however, drew attention to another coin type which appears to show the same figures, and proposed a more satisfactory identification, based on this type : « il doit s'agit de deux Génies en rapport, peut-être, avec les deux légions fondatrices de la colonie d'Héliopolis » [15]. This identification has also been adopted by Ziad Sawaya [16].

Hajjar's hypothesis was based on our second type :

2. Two male figures, naked except for cloaks, standing facing either side of radiate and turreted bust of Tyche on cippus. Each male figure holds a vexillum and an animal by its front legs. Between the vexilla, LEG ; around, VIII AVG – V MACED ; beneath, COL HEL (*Fig. 7*). De Saulcy, p. 13, no. 7 (« deux figures militaires ») ; Ronzevalle, *op. cit.*, n. 2, plate XVI, 2a-b.



Fig. 7 – Type 2. Reverse of a bronze coin of Philip I from Heliopolis.

This type seems to show two similar figures to those of our first type, posed heraldically either side of a portable bust of the Tyche of Heliopolis. It occurs only once as a coin type, and was issued during the reign of Philip (AD 244-249). Instead of the bunches of foliage they hold vexilla, and the inscription around seems to suggest strongly that they are indeed genii of the two legions, V Macedonica and VIII Augusta. The animals that they hold still cannot be identified with certainty, and in this case it is clear that both heads of the animals are turned away. The one on the left has horns and may be a goat or stag [17], and the animal

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14. Hajjar, I, p. 136-7 ; no. 125.

15. Hajjar, II, p. 467-8 ; *LIMC*, *s.v.* « Heliopolitani dei », no. 124 ; but note they are described as « ephebes » in his *ANRW* II 18.4 article, p. 2591.

16. I am grateful to Ziad Sawaya for allowing me to see, in advance of publication, his text discussing the coin types of Heliopolis.

17. The horns are clearly visible on the specimen illustrated in Ronzevalle, *op. cit.*, n. 2, plate XVI, 2a ; and in N. Jidejian, *Baalbek-Heliopolis, 'City of the Sun'*, Beirut (1975), fig. 223.

on the right looks more like a wolf or dog than a lion, but some other animal such as a ram or a panther is possible given the small size of the image and its general lack of detail. This time they seem to be held by the neck rather than by the forelegs. The figures both wear cloaks and their facing heads do not appear to be differentiated by facial hair ; though as usual all specimens are too worn to be certain.

The interpretation of the figures as genii of the two legions might seem the most economic interpretation. We might therefore declare the problem of identity solved and propose that the two figures found on our first type are also the genii of the V Macedonica and VIII Augusta. The animal attributes, however, remain something of a puzzle. The animal most commonly associated with both the V Macedonica and VIII Augusta was the bull, but neither of these creatures resembles a bull. However, given our limited knowledge of legionary animal symbols it is possible that other creatures such as stags, goats and rams were additional icons of these two legions [18].

Although the identifications of these figures as Mercury Heliopolitanus and Gennaios-Genneas put forward by Ronzevalle might no longer find favour, his suggestion that the figures either side of the Tyche bust are in fact deities whose cults « jouissait de la faveur des légions romaines établies à Héliopolis » [19] ought not to be dismissed outright, given our current knowledge. Their animal attributes may be linked to their roles as deities in their own right, with their secondary role being that of genii or protectors of the veteran settlers. This is what Haider proposes in an attempt to identify them as Hermes and Dionysus in the role of genii [20]. It may be significant here that the vexilla could appear as independent symbols without the two male figures : a type issued under Valerian and Gallienus (AD 253-268) shows the Tyche bust flanked by the vexilla but the figures are absent. Another variant of the same period has the Tyche bust flanked by victories holding an inflated veil over the bust, rather than vexilla or male figures [21]. Neither of these types need detain us, except in so far as they illustrate the fact that the Tyche bust was not inseparable from the two males and could be depicted with other symbols and figures, just as the two males could be depicted independently

18. It is difficult to obtain information on the animal symbols of the legions (a useful list tabulation is provided by Y. Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army*, London [2000], p. 246-7). Most of the evidence appears to derive from third century imperial coin types. These show that the V Macedonica's symbols were a bull and an eagle and that the VIII Augusta's was also a bull. No stags or goats appear in Le Bohec's table ; the ram was a symbol of I Minervia, which was based in Germany.

19. *Op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 56.

20. *Op. cit.*, n. 6, p. 125-6.

21. On these two types, see *SNG Cop* 444 and 443 respectively. The first of these types is also illustrated by Ronzevalle, *op. cit.*, n. 2, plates III, 4 and XXXVII, 3.

of the Tyche or military insignia. However, the last of these two types appears to be a variant of a much more elaborate one found on coins of Septimius Severus, Philip I and his wife Otacilia Severa, which is of relevance :

3. Tyche standing, radiate and wearing polos, holding a cornucopia, beneath a veil held by two smaller, wingless female figures on columns. Flanking the Tyche are two small naked male figures, each holding an uncertain object in a raised hand, as if presenting it to Tyche (*Fig. 8a-b*). On the coins of Septimius Severus Tyche also holds a wreath ; on those of Philip and Otacilia, she holds a ship's rudder, which rests on a globe at her feet. On coins of Septimius Severus there are objects under the two female figures stand that look like shields or baetyls. De Saulcy p. 8, no. 9 ; p. 13, no. 8 ; p. 14, 1 ; *BMC Galatia*, etc. p. 293, nos. 21-22 ; p. 294, nos. 24-25 ; *SNG Cop* 434, 436.



Fig. 8a – Type 3. Reverse of a bronze coin of Septimius Severus from Heliopolis.



Fig. 8b – Type 3. Reverse of a bronze coin of Otacilia Severa, wife of Philip I, from Heliopolis.

Here the configuration seems to recall that of type 2, with a central Tyche flanked by two naked males, the latter much smaller than on the previous type, and without the animals or vexilla. An identical standing Tyche with a rudder and cornucopia appears between two lions (the attributes here of Mercury Heliopolitanus or Atargatis ?) on a dedication to Jupiter Heliopolitanus from the reign of Gordian III, now in the Capitoline Museum in Rome [22]. The details, including the globe at the foot of the rudder, provide a neat parallel with the Tyche on our coin type. A similar Tyche also adorns the base of the well-known bronze statuette of Jupiter Heliopolitanus, now in the Louvre [23]. The inflated veil above Tyche on the coins may be an attempt to recall the large veil draped around the cult image of Venus Heliopolitana [24].

The small male figures either side of Tyche (absent from the Rome relief) do not appear to have excited much interest. De Saulcy identified them as children

22. A good image of this can be found in Jidejian, *Baalbek-Heliopolis*, Beirut (1975), fig. 168. Note that Seyrig suggested the lions were attributes of Mercury : *op. cit.*, n. 11, p. 347-8.

23. Jidejian, fig. 135-137. This Tyche has several additional associations apart from that with Venus Heliopolitana, with Nemesis and the Muses, among others : Haider, *op. cit.*, n. 6.

24. Ronzevalle, *op. cit.*, n. 2, plate XXXIII, 6 and p. 108 includes this type in a discussion of such veils.

on issues of Severus, but simply as small figures on those of Philip. Winnefeld, unwilling to commit himself, saw them merely as « figures » [25]. In *BMC* Warwick Wroth tentatively described them as athletes, no doubt mindful of the later coins of Valerian and Gallienus referring to games at Heliopolis. Hajjar identified them as ephebes holding torches [26]. Mørkholm did not attempt to identify them at all in *SNG Copenhagen*. Fleischer saw them as erotes [27], and Sawaya has likewise drawn a parallel between these small figures on coins of Heliopolis and the small, torch-bearing erotes flanking the city goddess on coins of neighbouring Berytus. The identification of the objects as torches is therefore quite plausible. Even so, the small figures on the coins of Heliopolis do not appear to be infants, and they do not have wings. Instead they appear to be adult males, both naked except for a chlamys (although on some coins, like that in figure 8a, one might imagine they are children). Their heraldic pose either side of the Tyche figure recalls the pose of the similar figures holding the animals and vexilla on our type 2. The objects they hold are too small for us to discern much detail, but on one specimen (*Fig. 8a*) the elongated object held by the left hand figure looks more like a bouquet than a torch. Seyrig noted similarities between these figures (« génies-acolytes ») and those flanking a male divinity on a badly-mutilated altar found at Heliopolis whose other faces depicted the Heliopolitan cult images of Jupiter, Venus and Mercury (*Fig. 9*). These « génies-acolytes » also hold up uncertain objects towards the divinity, although they are clothed and wear pointed hats or crowns and could be priests. Nevertheless, Seyrig identified the objects held by the « genies » on the coins as « rameaux » [28].



Fig. 9 – Drawing of one face of an altar from Baalbek, showing a male divinity holding a scepter, flanked by two acolytes. After SEYRIG, *op. cit.* n. 28, fig. 2.

25. « Zwei nackte kleine Gestalten », in WIEGAND, II (*op. cit.*, n. 1), p. 126.

26. *ANRW* II 18.4, p. 2591.

27. R. FLEISCHER, « Ein Gruppe syrisch-phönikischer Bronzstatuetten-Basen », *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 1 (1983), p. 31-42, at p. 38 ; see also his article « Gott oder Herrscher ? Zwei syrischer Denkmäler der Kleinkunst severischer Zeit », *AA* (1983), p. 253-271, at p. 257. I am grateful to Andreas Kropp for drawing my attention to these two papers.

28. H. SEYRIG, « Heliopolitana », *BMB* 1 (1937), p. 77-100 = *Scripta varia*, Paris (1985), p. 65-89, esp. p. 79-80 and p. 80, n 1. Note however his description of them as « génies enfantins » in his review of RONZEVALLE, *op. cit.*, n. 10, p. 365. For a

I might therefore propose an alternative interpretation : might the objects these « genies » hold be aspergilla, and might they be shown in the act of using them ? [29]. Perhaps the discovery of a very well-preserved example would resolve the matter.

A unique coin of Philip I from the collection in Berlin shows this Tyche figure, flanked by the two male figures in the same poses, within a tetrastyle temple, which suggests that the figures were part of a sculptural ensemble that formed a cult image [30]. Unfortunately the coin's state of preservation does not allow it to contribute further to the debate about the identity and function of the two male figures, or their attributes.

A fourth type may be related, and if so, also raises further questions about the identity of two male figures :

4. Two male figures seated facing one another, holding a prize crown containing palm branches between them ; beneath crown, ear of corn ; behind the left hand figure, bunch of foliage ; behind the right hand figure, vine (*Fig. 10*). *BMC Galatia etc.*, p. 295, no. 32 ; De Saulcy p. 17, no. 13.



Fig. 10 – Type 4. Reverse of a bronze coin of Valerian from Heliopolis. Note the object behind the left hand figure, and compare it with the objects in *Figs 11* and *16*.

The figures have normally been identified as a pair of athletes [31]. Though athletes do feature on Heliopolitan issues of this period, the identification of

photograph of the altar, see Jidejian, *op. cit.* n. 16, fig. 157 ; the best image is that provided by Hajjar, I, p. 13-17, no. 5.

29. For images seeming to show aspergilla in use, see THESCRA V, 2b, nos. 8a-b (Ara pacis Augustae), 12 (Trajan's column), 830 (Funerary monument of Lucius Lartius Anthus), and perhaps 968 (relief in Budapest) ; on coins of Elagabalus, *BMCRE* V, p. 564, nos 225-6. The gestures, with the aspergillum held up in the hand furthest from the viewer, are similar to those on the coins of type 3. From the Near East : the mutilated relief of a priest from the temple at Chhim in Lebanon seems to show him holding a branch in his raised hand (M. Tallon, « Sanctuaires et itinéraires du Chouf et du Sud de la Beqa », *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 43 [1968], p. 233-250, pl. III ; Krumeich, *op. cit.* n. 7, p. 195 and pl. 55a).

30. Winnefeld in Wiegand II (*op. cit.*, n. 1), p. 126. Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen Berlin, 1873, ex Fox, object number 18209418.

31. E.g., in *BMC* : « Two naked athletes, facing one another, seated on rocks, supporting an agonistic urn containing two palm-branches ; each raises one hand to his head and with the other supports the urn ; between them, tree (cypress ?); behind the

these two figures as such seems improbable. They are draped about the waist and recline against attributes : the right hand figure a vine and the left hand figure an object which looks like a tree or a bunch of foliage. De Saulcy considered this latter object to be a cypress [32], and this description was tentatively followed in the British Museum Catalogue [33]. The object between the two figures and under the prize crown appears to be an ear of corn, not a cypress as Wroth suggested. Such a device occurs on other coins of Heliopolis : on coins of Philip and Otacilia Severa, showing the temple of Jupiter and on coins of the same rulers showing the propylaea to the Jupiter sanctuary [34]. It is generally believed that in this context the ear of corn is a symbol of Jupiter Heliopolitanus, though ears of corn are also held by the figure identified as Mercury Heliopolitanus [35]. Indeed, the use of symbols as subsidiary marks on coins of Heliopolis is common : a purse and caduceus features in conjunction with a bust of Mercury and a temple thought to be that of Mercury Heliopolitanus ; and military standards and a cornucopia are clearly associated with Tyche.

The vine ought to be associated with the cult of Dionysus/Bacchus at Heliopolis and would appear to be the only explicit reference to this cult on its coinage. We might therefore assume that on the right we have Dionysus/Bacchus. The object on the left hand side, if it is to be identified as a cypress, might be seen as the symbol of a young god of regeneration. However, this would seem to present us with problems rather than solutions, since the young god of regeneration is traditionally considered to be identical with Dionysus/Bacchus, who in turn is assimilated to Mercury Heliopolitanus [36]. In this case, syncretism would leave our left-hand figure without an identity separate from the right-hand one. Of course one could argue that they represent separate aspects of the same deity, a concept sometimes advanced in cases where we encounter representations of the « triad »

rock on l., tree (cypress ?) ; behind the rock on r., tree ? » ; *IGLS* VI, p. 293-4, no. 13 (vine and « cypress » not noted).

32. P. 17, no. 13.

33. Wroth took other unclear symbols to be cypresses : for example, the corn ear that appears in the propylaea of the Temple of Jupiter : *BMC* p. 292, no 16 ; an identification followed by Haider, *op. cit.*, n. 6, p. 134.

34. *IGLS* VI, p. 43.

35. Hajjar, *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 133.

36. H. Seyrig, *op. cit.* above, n. 11, p. 12 and especially p. 42-47 ; Hajjar, *op. cit.* n. 1, vol. I, p. 111, 140-1, 146-7 ; vol. II, p. 509, 518.

together with a fourth deity [37]. Alternatively one could see them as separate deities associated with an agrarian cult of regeneration. No doubt some solution can be found amid the seemingly endless choice of almost hermetic interconnections between divinities that have been proposed by students of Near Eastern cults, but perhaps a solution is premature when we do not know the identity of the left-hand figure, or know for certain that the object behind him is indeed a tree. We can hardly use the object's size in comparison to the figure as an indication of scale of this object, especially given the size of the ear of corn between the two figures, although the « cypress » is not much larger in proportion to the figures than the bunches of foliage and figures found on the coins of type 1.



Fig. 11 – Reverse of a bronze coin of Damascus, from the reign of Philip I. Note the object in the upper field, and compare it with the object in *Figs 10* and *16*.



Fig. 12 – Reverse of a bronze coin of Damascus of Volusian (AD 251-253), showing a male figure with a Phrygian cap, short tunic and cloak, holding a bouquet. His other arm is raised but it is impossible to tell whether he holds anything in that hand. Before him is a large vessel.

At this point I would like to draw attention to some parallels from elsewhere in the region which, while they may shed no certain light on the identity of either figure, provide some support for the identity of the object. A similar-looking device to the « cypress » appears on coins of Damascus in conjunction with a scene of sacrifice (*Fig. 11*), and is held by a deity in a Phrygian cap, standing before a large cantharus or crater, on another Damascene coin (*Fig. 12*) [38]. Further afield, one notes that a figure of the Syrian god Hadad holds something resembling the « cypress » on a relief from Dura Europus (*Fig. 13*) and on coins of Hierapolis (*Fig. 14*). The similarity between this object and representations of cypresses might

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37. E.g. on the four-sided altar from Bechouat, showing Jupiter, Venus, Mercury and a fourth figure, a nude male, identified as Bacchus and assimilated with Mercury Heliopolitanus : H. Seyrig, « Nouveaux monuments de Baalbek et de la Beqaa », *BMB* 16 (1961), p. 109-135 = *Scripta Varia*, p. 97-130, at p. 120-121.

38. De Saulcy, p. 47, no. 6 ; *SNG Switzerland* II : *Katalog der Sammlung Jean-Pierre Righetti*, Bern (1993), no. 2518. Note the presence of a crater on the stele in Gaziantep museum showing two priests, one holding an aspergillum (Gatier, *op. cit.*, n. 8, p. 87 and fig. 6). Other coins of Damascus show a figure of Marsyas standing next to a cypress-like device (de Saulcy, p. 51, no. 9) or a « cypress » between a horse and a bull (de Saulcy, p. 52, no. 12) ; in this case the scale strongly suggests a tree.



Fig. 13 – Detail of the relief from Dura Europus showing Hadad and Atargatis. Note that the male figure of Hadad (left) holds a bouquet-like object. Photo © Ted Kaizer. Reproduced by permission of Yale University Art Gallery.



Fig. 14 – Detail of the reverse of a silver tetradrachm of Caracalla (AD 198-217), attributed to Hierapolis, showing Hadad and Atargatis. On the right, Atargatis holds a sceptre and a distaff ; on the left, Hadad holds a scepter and a smaller object that may be a branch or bouquet ; compare its shape to the object in *fig. 16*. Photo Michel Prieur.



Fig. 15 – Reverse of a bronze coin of Damascus, from the reign of Elagabalus (AD 218-222), showing a male figure with a Phrygian cap, holding a cypress-shaped bouquet over his shoulder, raising his other hand towards a cypress.

not be accidental, and it may be an attempt to indicate that the object was itself a sprig from such a tree, and therefore an object used in cults where the cypress was a symbol or cult object. Indeed, an unpublished Damascene coin type in the British Museum collection would appear to support this idea (*Fig. 15*) [39]. Though the coin is corroded, the type itself is fairly clear : it shows the deity with the Phrygian cap, standing left, holding a cypress-shaped bouquet over his shoulder and with his other hand raised ; to the left of him is a full-scale cypress tree.

39. BM 1931-6-3-27 (Coles collection).

This fourth coin type ought to be considered in conjunction with our final type, also produced during the reigns of Valerian and Gallienus :

5. Prize crown on table, containing an ear of corn and two palms, the whole flanked by a caduceus on the right and a branch or bouquet (?) on the left (*Fig. 16*). DE SAULCY p. 15, no. 4.



Fig. 16 – Type 5. Reverse of a bronze coin of Valerian from Heliopolis.

This time the figures are absent, and instead the prize crown rests on a table. It contains the two palm branches and, in addition, the ear of corn that in the previous type was located in the field beneath the crown. The identification of the object on the right as a caduceus seems unequivocal, and a very similar form of caduceus accompanies the bust of Mercury on other coins of Valerian and Gallienus [40]. The object on the left appears to be similar to or the same as the object next to the left hand figure on the previous type 4, albeit floating in the field rather than anchored to the ground [41]. In the past it has been tentatively identified as either a palm or another ear of corn [42]. A set of divine attributes seems likely : Jupiter symbolized by the ear of corn ; Mercury by the caduceus ; and a third deity symbolized by the « cypress » or bouquet. One might see, from their positions, a reproduction of the configuration of symbols and figures on type 4, so that Dionysus and Mercury are one and the same, but this would still leave the third deity unidentified.

I have reserved one final representation until last. The shape of the « cypress » on the coins is remarkably similar in appearance to an object on an altar from Brahliya in the Antilebanon and now in the National Museum in Damascus. This has been identified by J.-P. Rey-Coquais as an *aspergillum* (*Fig. 17*). It has what appears to be a handle, a feature clearly seen on the « bouquets » held by the priest Narkisos at Niha (*Fig. 2*), by another image of a priest from Niha, and on that held by the priest Germanos on the column from Qartaba in Lebanon. [43]. The Brahliya altar bears a dedication to Zeus and Apis, which might seem to divorce it from any

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40. DE SAULCY, p. 15, no. 3.

41. The possibility that it might be a harpa should probably be discounted, because there is no other evidence of such a symbol at Heliopolis ; although in this context it might be worth re-examining the female figure on the octagonal altar from Fiki that seems to be holding a similar, cypress-like device over her shoulder : RONZEVALLE, *op. cit.*, n. 2, plate XXVII, 3 and p. 95-101 (« la déesse à la harpé »). Note also the device held by the deity on coins of Orthosia : RONZEVALLE, plate XXX, 2.

42. DE SAULCY (« palme ») ; *IGLS* VI, p. 293, no. 3 (« epi ») ; followed by HAJJAR, *op. cit.*, n. 1, I, p. 107, no. 98 ; *LIMC*, *s.v.* « Heliopolitani dei », p. 584, no. 100.

43. Brahlia : REY-COQUAIS, *op. cit.*, n. 8 ; Niha : Above, n. 7-8 ; for an image of the second priest, SEYRIG, *op. cit.* n. 37, p. 117-120 ; for a recent image, DOUMET-SERHAL,



Fig. 17 – Detail of the left side of the altar from Brahliya. Note the similarity between this object and those shown in *Figs 10, 11* and *16*. Photo by the author, 2008.

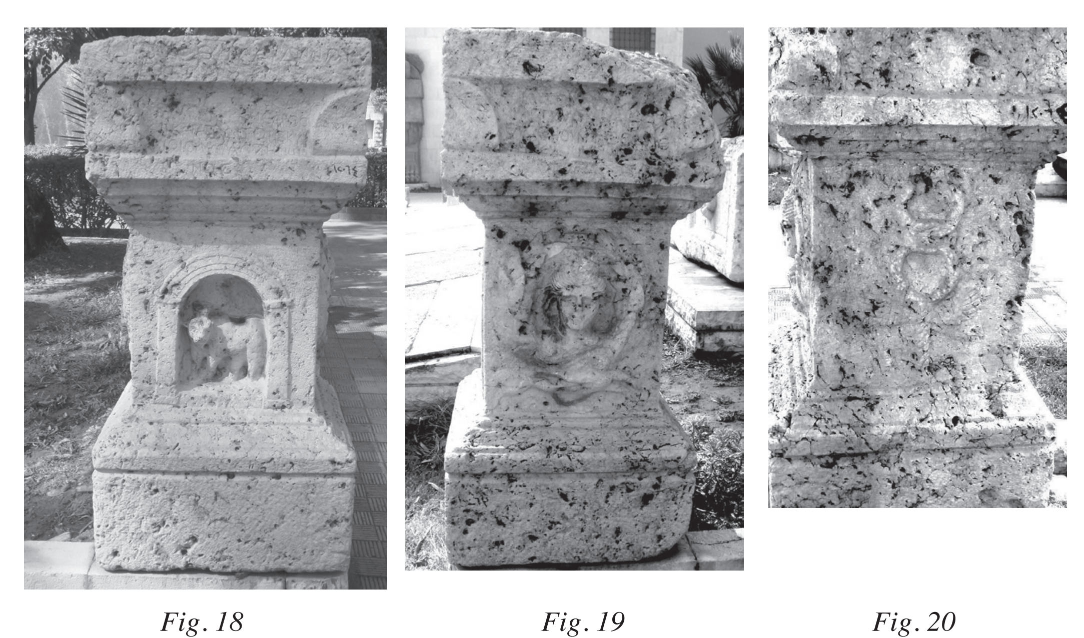


Fig. 18 *Fig. 19* *Fig. 20*

Fig. 18 – Front of the Brahliya altar, showing the bull in a niche. The beginning of the inscription with the dedication to Zeus and Apis by Lysas, son of Zenon, is at the top.
Fig. 19 – Right side of the Brahliya altar, showing the bust of a city goddess in a wreath and a river god swimming beneath. The dedicatory inscription continues on this side.
Fig. 20 – Rear face of the Brahliya altar, showing the winged caduceus.

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op. cit., n. 10, p. 143, 187, no. 92. Germanos : Gatier, *op. cit.* n. 8, p. 85 ; image in Doumet-Serhal, p. 145, 188, no. 94.

association with cult practices at Heliopolis. However, in his study of this object, Youssef Hajjar notes another inscription from Brahliya made by a priest of Zeus and Apis to Jupiter Heliopolitanus, and proposes that the Heliopolitan cult could have influenced the form and iconography of the local cult [44]. Perhaps of relevance here is the fact that the other sides of the altar are decorated with a bull (appropriate for a local Baal or Apis), a bust of Tyche in a wreath, and a caduceus (*Fig. 18-20*).

Hajjar considers that these images help to provide an iconographic link between the deities of this locality and those of Heliopolis : a local Zeus-Apis ; a Tyche-Atargatis/Astarte ; and Mercury. Although he takes the « cypress » to be a pine cone and a device associated with a Bacchus/Mercury-type *dieu-fils*, the general proposition is a tempting one. We would have a parallel for at least three devices found on Heliopolitan coins : the bust of Tyche ; the caduceus, and the « cypress ». Whether the latter two represent two separate deities or two aspects of a single deity is perhaps more difficult to determine given the presence of two separate figures on the coins. Until we know more a solution may be beyond our grasp.

Clearly there is much yet to be learned about the cults of the Heliopolitan sanctuaries. Our evidence has neither changed nor increased much since the middle of the twentieth century, and the debates to which this evidence has lent its weight have been well-rehearsed for almost a hundred years. In these debates the coin types have played a somewhat peripheral role (leaving aside the « obvious » types with the temples, athletes or arrangements of prize crowns), no doubt in part because they do not fit well with the content of those debates [45]. These coins hint at some kind of tripartite arrangement, but one involving different deities rather than a fixed pattern : Tyche and two « acolytes » ; and Jupiter and two acolytes (one of whom, or perhaps even both of whom, may be a Bacchus/Mercury) [46]. These acolytes could also appear as a pair without reference to any other deity (type 1), assuming that they are the same acolytes throughout. Perhaps that assumption is wrong ; but at the very least their poses, the bouquets that they hold, and their association with animals have some parallels among the cultic images of Heliopolis (Ain ed-Jouj) and elsewhere in the Bekaa and Damascus region, and such representations were part of the religious iconography of that region. The bouquet or bunch of foliage, whatever its function, was clearly not a device particular to any one deity, and could

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44. Y. Hajjar, « Une dédicace de Brahlia à Zeus et Apis », *Annales archéologiques arabes syriennes* 27-28 (1977-8), p. 187-195. See also the remarks by R. Mouterde noted by Rey-Coquais : *IGLS* VI, p. 63-4, no. 2731.

45. Hajjar, *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 164-5, emphasing the absence of the cult images on the coinage.

46. On this arrangement, of a deity accompanied by smaller acolytes or figures that « glorify » the central figure, see the papers by Fleischer, above, n. 27.

be used alone as a symbol of the divine, in the same way as the caduceus and purse symbols of Mercury, the standards and cornucopia of the Tyche of Heliopolis, or the ear of corn (of Jupiter or Mercury ?). The possibility that there were different sorts of bouquets, composed of specific kinds of foliage (for example, a sprig of cypress), and that each was specific to a certain deity, is plausible, but, given our current knowledge, entirely speculative.

The fact that the coins of Heliopolis do not provide us with unequivocal representations of a triad of Jupiter, Venus and Mercury is in itself interesting, if only as evidence of a divergence between what we might expect and what was considered important by the local elites who we assume influenced or chose the types [47]. Indeed, it is the stone reliefs and lead figurines from sites *outside* the main sanctuaries that present us with the images we expect, although even these show us that the three main cult images could sometimes be associated with a variety of other divine figures. The coin types seem to offer us a window onto a slightly different religious world : in which Venus' role as a city Tyche was stressed, to the exclusion of other roles ; where Jupiter was referred to only through his temple, the inscription I.O.M.H. and (probably) the symbol of an ear of corn ; and where Mercury was made manifest only in his generic, hellenised form. Perhaps what we see is the difference between the official civic conception of cult and more popular manifestations such as those evidenced by the Ain ed-Jouj figurines. Dare one go further, and suggest that the familiar images of Jupiter Heliopolitanus and associated deities provided by the figurines from Ain ed-Jouj and reliefs (from Ain ed-Jouj and elsewhere) are *not* necessarily incontrovertible evidence for the appearance of the cult statues in the great sanctuaries of the city during the second and third centuries AD ? Perhaps that is taking the proverbial absence of evidence as evidence of absence a step too far ; but it is symptomatic of the inscrutable quality of our data, and the general poverty of that data, that such doubts can be raised. Whatever the case, the puzzling coin types examined here cannot be ignored simply because they are difficult either to interpret or to reconcile with our own conceptions of the Heliopolitan cults. They were clearly a part of the religious milieu of the colony, of prime significance to the civic elites, and as such deserve careful consideration. But any investigation of cult iconography needs to be frank about what can be achieved : in such matters, the crucial evidence is often in the detail and, regrettably for us, that detail is often more obscure than we like to pretend.

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47. K. BUTCHER, « Information, legitimation, or self-legitimation ? Popular and elite designs on the coin types of Syria », in C. HOWGEGO, V. HEUCHERT, A. BURNETT (eds), *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces*, Oxford (2005), p. 143-156.